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Committee on Conferences
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Draft report

Addendum

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Documentation and publication-related matters

A. Submission, availability and distribution of documentation

Introduction and overview

1. At its 477th meeting, on 12 September 2006, the Committee considered the sections of the report of the Secretary-General on pattern of conferences concerning document management (A/61/129, paras. 44-67 and annex IV). The Committee was informed that, in the interests of clear accountability, statistics on the submission, processing and issuance of all slotted documents for the first half of 2006 were presented in annex IV. The Department of General Assembly and Conference Management had made advance planning, capacity planning and dynamic prioritization the three pillars of its proactive document management system, applied with flexibility in view of the fluidity of the conference-servicing needs of intergovernmental bodies. Through intensive work with author departments, using the tools of the slotting system and waiver management, the timeliness of submissions under the mandated 10-4-6 framework had improved, but showed room for further improvement. Capacity planning was aimed at matching capacity with expected workload. Dynamic prioritization referred to the assignment of priority ratings that changed as documents approached the time when they were to be considered and constituted a way of adjusting to work overloads while providing the documents most needed for deliberations by intergovernmental bodies. The Committee's support for the enforcement of past decisions on the control and limitation of documentation was solicited.

2. As requested by Member States, the Department had set up a variety of transparency and accountability mechanisms. To invite feedback from intergovernmental bodies on ways to improve client satisfaction, it had instituted the

practice of providing document-service reports to the presiding officers of bodies receiving pre-session documents; a total of 29 such reports had been provided by June 2006 and 10 responses received, generally positive. As an author department, the Department insisted on 100 per cent compliance with submission deadlines by its staff.

Discussion

3. The Committee stressed that it attached great importance to both the quality and the timeliness of documentation. The progress made in timely issuance was welcome, but much more needed to be done to improve compliance with General Assembly decisions on the distribution of documents in accordance with the six-week rule, although it was acknowledged that failure to comply with that rule was sometimes due to factors beyond the control of the Department. The advances in electronic inputting and electronic document management were also welcomed. The importance of simultaneous distribution in all official languages was stressed, and greater vigilance was requested in ensuring that documents were not published on the website in only some of the official languages.

4. In response to a request for clarification, a representative of the Secretariat explained that the handful of 8-4-4 arrangements mentioned in paragraph 47 of the report of the Secretary-General were not a pilot project but an effort to accommodate certain bodies that had stated a preference for a later submission deadline for their documents and in return could accept later issuance. The Executive Boards of the United Nations Development Programme and the United Nations Population Fund, for example, held three sessions per year and had only 11 weeks between sessions, which made a 10-week prior submission date for the authors impracticable. Some delegations expressed interest in the 8-4-4 experiment and commended the Secretariat for taking the initiative to find a solution that worked for both parties. In answer to the question of whether the bodies that had opted out of the 10-4-6 format were actually experiencing more timely issuance of their pre-session documents, the representative of the Secretariat responded that, although issuance four weeks prior to sessions had not been fully achieved, the timeliness of issuance for those bodies had clearly improved.

5. In answer to the question of whether efforts were continuing to persuade depository libraries to waive their entitlement to hard copies of documents, a representative of the Secretariat explained that such efforts had not borne fruit, in part because some libraries in developing countries were not equipped to handle electronic copies successfully. However, the Secretariat was reminded that the mandate to continue its efforts in that regard was still in effect.

6. With regard to the request contained in paragraph 53 of the report concerning exceptions to page limits, delegations asked whether the Secretariat was asking the Committee to recommend that a mechanism be set up in the Fifth Committee to review exceptions on a case-by-case basis. It was agreed instead that a gentle reminder that all matters relating to conference management, including documentation, fell within the purview of the Fifth Committee would suffice.

7. Committee members welcomed the efforts to establish mechanisms of transparency and to solicit feedback on client satisfaction but felt that much more should be done in that regard. Most of the mechanisms mentioned in the report were internal and went no further than a committee secretariat. Since the key performance

indicator was the satisfaction of Member States with the services provided, it was crucial that the Secretariat take a proactive approach towards evaluating the feedback of Member States on the quality of conference services, in accordance with the relevant provisions of General Assembly resolution 60/236 B. It was suggested that if the many comments on document availability voiced in the various intergovernmental bodies were compiled, tabulated and analysed, the Secretariat would receive a clearer picture of the views of Member States. The website was another means of receiving feedback that could be more thoroughly utilized.